

Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Whitfield
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
Hearing on "The American Energy Initiative: A Focus on the New
Proposal to Tighten National Standards for Fine Particulate Matter"
June 28, 2012
(As Prepared for Delivery)

This morning is the twenty-first day of our hearing on the American Energy Initiative. Over the course of this hearing, we have heard expert testimony on a number of very problematic EPA rules.

Many of these new and proposed measures threaten to impose high costs and job losses. Quite a few are part of EPA's unjustified war on coal.

Each new rule adds to the train wreck of rules coming out of EPA many of which are the result of litigation and settlement agreements, which I believe is not the way major policy decisions should be made.

But today, we will discuss the proposed National Ambient Air Quality Standard for fine particulate matter.

Specifically, EPA's proposal calls for ratcheting down the already-stringent annual standard for fine particulate matter set in 2006. The new 2006 standard hasn't even been fully implemented yet.

Indeed, this committee recommended in a recent letter to EPA that the agency consider retention of the current standard, but this suggestion was ignored.

I might add that particulate matter has many natural sources, such as forest fires, windblown dust, volcanoes, and even sea spray. Even EPA admits that background levels can approach the agency's existing standards, and on occasion exceed them.

Among the man-made sources of fine particulate matter are a wide variety of activities - such as driving a car, running a factory or power plant, farming, and even household fireplaces and backyard barbeques. And it is precisely because fine particulate matter comes from so many different sources and activities that EPA's proposed rule would be costly and intrusive.

In fact, in order to achieve earlier particulate matter standards, the agency even issued standards for wood stoves. One can only imagine how many different activities would be impacted by the more stringent proposed rule.

It is also important to note that when we are talking about the costs of the proposed fine particulate matter standard, it is not just a matter of dollars and cents. The costs can also be measured in terms of damage to public health and safety.

For example, roadwork is a source of particulate matter emissions, and EPA's proposal could make it harder to undertake the kinds of projects that make our roads and highways safer. So when we discuss the claimed public health benefits of the rule, we need to consider all sides of the issue.

And of course, when we are talking about regulations with the potential to destroy jobs, we need to take into account the very serious adverse health implications of unemployment.

As costly as the new fine particulate matter standard would be in isolation, we also must be mindful of all the other new and proposed rules that will also apply to many of the same sources and activities.

Whether it's a domestic manufacturer struggling to remain globally competitive or a coal-fired power plant owner facing costly upgrades in order to remain in compliance, we have to consider the costs of EPA's fine particulate matter proposal in the context of Utility MACT, Cross-State Air Pollution Rule, Boiler MACT, ozone standards, greenhouse gas regulations, and all the others.

I should note that reductions in air pollution are an environmental success story. These emissions were addressed by the 1970 Clean Air Act, and the standards have been tightened several times since then.

And the reduction in emissions over the past 4 decades has been remarkable. But that also means that we very well may have reached the point where yet another new standard would do more harm than good.

That is why we need to look before we leap on new regulations.

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